

How
can we
reach
people?

Facebook?
Twitter?
Text?

Who is God
calling us to
serve?

Check out these
websites for ideas
and information:

[beyondrelevance](#)

[Kem Meyer's Blog](#)

[Collide Magazine](#)

Can we afford
postcards?
Google "online
printers" for
prices



Should we use a
building photo or
a photo of
people???



Creating a Communication Plan for Churches

Who are we as a
church? What is
our mission?

If you read the story of Moses and the burning bush in Exodus, you can see that Moses asks the questions that we should be asking as churches when it comes to communicating with our communities. “Who am I?” Moses asks, wondering why he was called to the task. Who are they? We may wonder when it comes to the people in our changing communities. “What shall I say to them?” Moses wonders, bewildered that God has such a big job for him. Creating a church **communication strategy** means exploring how your congregation answers those same questions. This guide will allow you to create a communications strategy statement step-by-step.

Step 1: WHO are we as a church? What is our mission?

Christ’s church has a corporate and individual mission in the world. While the goal everywhere is to serve Christ, each individual church usually shows one aspect of Christ’s personality.

Which statement **best** describes where your congregation’s energy is focused?

If you care for each other by providing food and visitation in times of need, you may be a *relational* church.

If you study the Word of God together and help each other to live by its principles, you may be an *authoritative* church.

If you are a community center, offering our space to various groups, your church may be either a *refuge* or *social center*.

If you have an informative and inspiring worship service that appeals to many, you may be a *seeker* church.

If you have a food pantry and participate in many local mission groups, you may have a *missional* church.

What one word best describes your congregation?

My church is a _____ church.

Step 2: WHO is God calling us to serve?

Describe the community in which your church is situated. Is it mostly elderly, retirees, families, transient college students? Are they affluent? Struggling? Is there a segment in the community that you want to target? Does the church have consensus on whom to serve? What does the demographic data tell you?

My audience is:

Step 3: WHAT are their needs? WHAT do they need to hear?

Every community has its unique stressors and these can help to define how the church can best serve the community. One way to think about it is to name the pain of the people who surround you. Are they older and lonely? Are they busy working multiple jobs and in need of family-centered programs? Are they young and looking for direction? What can Jesus do for them? Another approach is to think of the life changes in that community. Will many of them be celebrating marriages or baptisms?

What is the pain in your community? _____

How can you help people celebrate? _____

Step 4: WHERE and WHEN can they be reached most easily?

That is where you need to be! The huge advantage of computer connections is that they don't require everyone to be in the same place at the same time. Circle the places where the people in your community gather or connect:

| | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Restaurant or coffee shop | TV | US mail |
| Soccer or other sports fields | Radio | Email |
| Community center or library | Facebook | Cell phone |
| Mall or shopping area | Twitter | Home phone |
| Church | MySpace | Text messaging |
| School | Tumblr | Each other's homes |
| Newspaper/magazine | Other websites | Workplace |

Notice that some of these are personal and some of these are public. A good strategy will have some of both.

Step 5: Strategy Statement:

Create a strategy that describes your church and the people you are trying to reach. At this time, do not limit yourself to what you think you can afford. The generic formula can look like this:

Your church
Your target community
What you will communicate
How you will communicate

Think about: How you may get feedback?

Here are some quick examples:

The Good Shepherd Church is a healing congregation that serves aging baby boomers as they transition from full time jobs to retirement and into old age. Our communication will recognize and articulate the fear and loneliness that these transitions can bring and reassure the community of Christ's love. We will seek to reach this community in-person as they gather in coffee shops and the community center. We will also send out emails and invite them to join our Facebook group.

Eden Church is a refuge in busy world. We are reaching out with God's love to the dual-income, commuter families by offering them ways to maintain healthy relationships with both Jesus and each other. Our communication will respect their time constraints and will be short and to the point. We will reach them via email, Facebook and text messages. We will also place our messages along the paths they travel, including the sports field, the grocery store and the shopping area.

Resources to learn more

Basic Communication websites and blogs:

www.beyondrelevance.com/

www.churchmarketingsucks.com/

www.collidemagazine.com/blog

<http://kemmeyer.typepad.com/>

Demographic information:

Get a Fact Sheet about your community from the **US Census** website by logging on to www.census.gov and choosing the American FactFinder in the left column and entering your zip code.

ZIPskinny (www.zipskinny.com) allows you to make numerical comparisons of different communities by zip code based on ages, incomes, etc.

My Best Segments (<http://www.claritas.com/MyBestSegments/Default.jsp>) provides descriptions of the people in the community as well as numerical data.

Another good source is **MissionInsite** (www.missioninsite) has even better community descriptions. However, if your presbytery does not subscribe, it can be pricy. ChurchInsite (www.churchinsite.com) is an affiliated group that offers more reasonably priced information.

Online Printers (often have design templates):

www.vistaprint.com

www.uprinting.com

www.printplace.com

For E-Newsletters

www.constantcontact.com

www.convio.com

www.verticalresponse.com

Books:

The Revolutionary Communicator by Jedd Medefind and Erik Likkesmoe is a wonderfully accessible for people who care about connecting with others in Christ. It looks at the different ways Jesus communicated in the Gospels, provides modern examples as well as personal reflections from the authors about communication in their daily lives.

Kem Meyer's book *Less Clutter. Less Noise* puts the congregation and visitors at the center of communication strategy, not necessarily the communicators. Instead of encouraging voluminous communication, she spends most of her time reminding the communicators that people are short on time and long on information. As a result, church communication should be short and relevant.

The *Church Communications Handbook* by Wanda Vassallo is a how-to book for creating and implementing a communication strategy. While the prose is heavy, the content is well-organized and accurate for someone beginning to think about their church's communication strategy.

Communication Theory for Christian Witness by Charles H. Kraft uses the language of academic communication theory, yet it is grounded in Christian scripture and witness and so applicable.

Andy Stanley's book *Communicating for Change* is a simple straightforward approach to creating a sermon motivates the congregation to action.

Crisis Communication Planning

Before the Crisis

Recognize that when a reporter calls it is an opportunity for *relationship* with a new person. Honor the opportunity God has placed in front of you. Information flows quickly. Reporters sometimes have to file a story within 15 minutes of arriving at a situation. Be sure they have your information!

Create and empower a Crisis Communications Team. They must have authority to react *right away*. The reporter will not wait for your committee to meet. She has her own deadline and job to think about.

Appoint and authorize Contacts/Speakers in priority order. If the first person is not available move quickly to the next person on the list.

Appoint an Extra Help Team for handling phone calls, escorting media or paperwork. This is primarily administrative stuff. These should be people at the office or who can quickly get to the office, if need arises.

Put together ALL emergency contact information for those listed above. Be sure EVERYONE has a copy. The office's administrative support is especially important since they will likely get the first phone call. Also, train the support staff to respond *immediately* to press inquiries. Your organization should respond within 15 minutes of a reporter's phone call or email.

Calming the Media Storm

Create Your Message—put together main themes and talking points before speaking to press. Practice a press conference with internal help, if possible.

Talk Early—Talk to the press first, if possible, and be helpful. Also, make every effort to contact people within your organization before the story hits the media. This prevents them from hearing about it on the evening news or reading it in the paper—NOT GOOD for morale. Talking first insures your side will be heard early on in the news cycle. People remember what they see and hear FIRST and LAST.

Ask the reporter the Most Important Question—How can I help you? Be sure to ask about the reporter's deadline and meet it! If a reporter catches you by surprise, assure him or her you will talk, ask for a short time to gather facts and call back allowing plenty of time for him/her to write the story. Meet the deadline at all costs!

Talk Often—the story will run with or without your input. Even if you have a prepared statement, be sure to answer questions and talk with the reporter whenever possible.

Talk Honestly—DO NOT try to withhold or be cagey with information or deny access. This will annoy and antagonize reporters and the story will not spin your way! Tell the facts as you know them. NEVER say that it's "proprietary" or "inappropriate" for you to give out information that's asked for. If you can't give out the entire answer, give what you can. If you don't know an answer, admit it and invite the reporter to call back after you get the information (and before the deadline, of course).

Express Concern and Goodwill Toward Those Involved—even if the situation is hostile, goodwill goes a long way with the public. Remember, audiences are more likely to remember *impressions* than *facts*.

Provide Background—Give the reporter any pamphlets or printed information about your organization, its purpose or mission. Tell them the history and talk about the positive things your group does beyond the scope of the crisis. You may get a positive story in the future.

Effective Written Communications

Have the courage to write simply.

- Use bullet points when possible.
- Keep text short and include white space.
- Don't try to prove your intelligence by using big words. Small words can communicate big ideas.
- Keep sentences short. Look for commas, semi-colons and ellipsis. These mean the sentence is too complex.

Use your tools.

Chances are you are creating your written communications on a computer. Use the **bold**, *italics*, underline and bullets to create a user-friendly document. The person reading your communication should know the key points at a glance, without having to wade through pages of text.

Keep it to a page.

Just because you have lots of facts at your disposal doesn't necessarily mean they are essential or even relevant to your audience or your communication. Narrow it down to the three things your audience cares about most or absolutely needs to know.

Tell it to your mother.

Writers often write the way they think they should in order to make a story sound more informative and authoritative. Good writers work hard to figure out how they would make the story interesting in casual conversation. Then, they clean up the story to get rid of bad grammar or inappropriate slang.

Don't overwhelm the audience with too many numbers or names.

- Keep numbers in a story to a minimum. Simplify whenever possible. For example, in most cases \$950,000 can be "nearly a million dollars."
- Use charts or graphs whenever possible.
- Ask yourself whether an unfamiliar name is necessary to your story. If the person is in your story because of his or her title, then perhaps you should use that instead.

Don't leave any unanswered questions.

All communications should answer the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when* and *why* questions. They should also answer the reader's question: *Why should I care?*